

Freedom of the City Parade



Penny Rogers, Lookout

More than 2,700 military members marched through downtown Victoria passing by the Legislature buildings en route to Ship Point where "The Homecoming" Statue was unveiled.

Navy Day brings excitement to military and civilian

Penny Rogers
Staff writer

Even before the Freedom of the City parade turned the streets of Victoria into a sea of marching sailors, soldiers, airmen and women, one couldn't help feel the pride building. Over 2,700 Maritime Forces Pacific members started filtering into the downtown core from every section of the city, in full dress uniform with shoes shined and medals displayed.

At first, the assembly area around Store and Pembroke Streets could have been mistaken for a social gathering with handshakes and laughter, but as the clock grew closer to the 9:30 a.m. start time, the crowd pulled apart and platoons began to form. Friends and colleagues helped each

other re-adjust collars and ties and joked about who may or may not make it to the end of the route.

Then the Thunder Whistle blew, directing the platoons to fall in and Rear Admiral Tyrone Pile took control. Moments later the Freedom of the City parade began.

As soon as the formation turned onto Douglas Street, the crowds were there, thousands strong, flags waving, cheering, many peering into the mass of men and women searching for family or friends. Others with no connection to the navy came out just to show their support and snap a few pictures.

The parade came to a halt at City Hall where RAdm Pile, sword held high, met with Chief Constable Jamie Graham, who

challenged the unit on its identity. After being recognized, the two then walked to the door of City Hall where RAdm Pile knocked three times before being welcomed inside by Mayor Dean Fortin. The Mayor and Councillors then lined up outside the entrance to City Hall and the Mayor read a proclamation declaring that Freedom of the City was granted.

Ceremony complete, RAdm Pile once again took his place at the head of the parade and the mass of black boots continued its march to Belleville Street, then up Government Street to Centennial Square where an appreciation barbeque was being hosted by the Downtown Victoria Business Association.

From here, the Naden Band of Maritime Forces Pacific, Guard and dignitaries trav-

elled to Wharf and Government Streets for the unveiling of the Homecoming Statue. The large crowd that had gathered was a mix of young and old, military, ex-military, cadets and civilian. Before the ceremony began, dozens searched the bricks that surround the statue looking for ones they had purchased or seeing if they recognized any names. After several emotional speeches by the dignitaries, including LGov Stephen Point, the crowd was graced with a song written by Ken Lavigne, accompanied by the Naden Band, called "I'm Coming Home."

Then the unveiling of the statue took place as a Sea King helicopter from 443 Maritime Helicopter Squadron Patricia Bay did a fly-past, ending the day's festivities in dramatic fashion.